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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 004197

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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIK-PASHTUN SUSPICIONS INFORM PARLIAMENT-PALACE
DISPUTE

REF: A. KABUL 1605
[1](#)B. KABUL 4153

KABUL 00004197 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: A/DCM Bruce Rogers for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/REL ISAF) Summary: Parliament debated and passed more legislation in its 2007 session than in any previous year, but became embroiled in a power struggle with the Karzai government. Palace-Parliament disputes erupted with increasing frequency throughout the session, and, at times, threatened to obstruct the latter's execution of its Afghan Compact-legislative responsibilities. Karzai fared well in this contest, but will face stiff challenges in 2008. The Palace and Parliament are seeking to define their relative constitutional prerogatives, a familiar phenomenon in a new democracy; however, the two institutions have increasingly become proxies in an ethnic contest between northern Tajiks and a more openly Pashtun Karzai. The former aim for constitutional accommodation of a parliamentary system with a symbolic Pashtun president dominated by a Tajik prime minister.

2007 Session Most Productive and Politicized to Date

[1](#)2. (SBU) Under Speaker Qanooni's leadership, Parliament considered 30-plus bills and resolutions during 2007 (septel), making the session its most productive to date. While Parliament did not dispose of all its agenda items, it approved several significant pieces of legislation including the UN Convention Against Corruption, a bill on the environment, and a bill on prisons and detention centers. Parliament also sent the President a media bill, which provides protections for a free press and establishes an independent media regulatory body.

[1](#)3. (C/REL ISAF) Against this backdrop of increased productivity, Parliament's Lower House also became the stage for a struggle over constitutional prerogatives between the United Front opposition group and President Karzai. Palace-Parliament tension was manifest throughout the 2007

session, but threatened to interfere with the latter's execution of its Afghan Compact legislative responsibilities on three occasions: when Karzai chose to ignore Parliament's vote of no-confidence on Foreign Minister Spanta (REF A); when he established by decree the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, and; when Karzai ignored Parliament's request that he suspend executive branch officials in the wake of the November 6 Baghlan bombing (REF B). In each case, though Karzai secured a precedent favoring the power of the Palace over that of the Parliament, he stoked the anger of a frustrated Speaker Qanooni and his United Front.

¶4. (C/REL ISAF) On all three occasions, United Front MPs denounced Karzai's actions as unconstitutional power grabs and threatened to shut down Parliament. Tensions culminated in the early December dispute over the culpability of executive branch officials for alleged security lapses leading to the Baghlan bombing. Though Qanooni did provoke a walkout, independent MPs, nervous about a possible loss of pay and privileges, pressured him into returning to the chamber two days later.

Elections Bill May Raise the Stakes in 2008

¶5. (C/ISAF) The Elections Law bill, which Parliament is to consider early in 2008, promises to be another flashpoint. The 2005 version of the law kept political party symbols off ballots and mandated single non-transferable voting, both of which weakened the visibility of political parties and favored Karzai's unity government. The United Front believes party symbols on ballots and proportional representation would help it gain seats. The two sides have already begun to spar over the bill.

Constitutional Battle is a Proxy for Ethnic Conflict

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¶6. (C/ISAF) The constitutional fight has increasingly become a proxy for the power struggle between Afghanistan's two largest ethnic groups, the Pashtuns and numerically smaller Tajiks. Pashtuns favor a strong president in a unity government. Tajiks, who are far more united and politically savvy, favor constitutional accommodation of a parliamentary system with a symbolic Pashtun president dominated by a Tajik prime minister.

¶7. (C/ISAF) The Tajik-Pashtun power struggle in Parliament has begun to infect the rest of the government. First Vice President Ahmad Zia Massoud, a Tajik, recently criticized his government's faltering anti-corruption campaign as a transparent attempt to reduce the influence of the former Northern Alliance, the Tajik-dominated mujahideen predecessor to the United Front. If Karzai is to avert a paralyzing break with the Tajiks, he will have to step carefully on Pashtun outreach, and especially reconciliation with former insurgents, so as not to alienate further Afghanistan's non-Pashtuns.

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